



The Harvard Crimson

ONLINE EDITION

News

Profs Make 'Most Influential' List

Published On 10/5/2008 11:31:09 PM

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While scholars have debated for centuries whether individuals can change history, Esquire magazine has named the 75 great men and women that it believes will shape the next 100 years.

Esquire's forward-looking list, published in honor of the magazine's 75th Anniversary, includes music producers, Nobel Prize winners, children of accused terrorists, and current heads of state. But as Esquire's editors compiled the list, individuals from one locale stood out.

"It was funny, as we were going through the list and updating biographical information, Cambridge kept coming up," said Esquire editor Ross Mccammon.

Twelve Harvard-affiliated individuals made the list, including four current professors: law professor Noah R. Feldman '92, human rights scholar Samantha Power, international relations expert Meghan L. O'Sullivan, and physicist Lisa Randall '83.

Mccammon said that Esquire's editors didn't actively search for individuals with Harvard affiliations.

"We don't go out and just look down the list of Harvard faculty," Mccammon said. "I think that's the success of universities like Harvard, you get the best people teaching some of the best people and that's a force."

Power, a Pulitzer-Prize winning author who has advised Barack Obama on foreign policy, agreed with Mccammon, saying that "the combination of brains and idealism that appears to pass through this University is a pretty potent combination."

"If you take brains, mix that with idealism, and incubate it in a setting that helps students rigorize how they go about their business in the world, it can sometimes spawn real influence," Power said.

She did note, though, that "influence is of course often inspired in places far from the ivory tower."

The criteria for making the list were complicated, according to Mccammon. Power was chosen "because her brand of moral pragmatism is helping reshape American foreign policy for the 21st century."

"We wanted to focus on people that are going to be making history," Mccammon said. "It's interesting because for some people it was almost all about potential and ideas."

Feldman, a senior fellow at the Council of Foreign Relations who briefly advised the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, said that challenge for him is "to get my ideas out there in this world and hope they have a positive effect."

According to Esquire, he was chosen "because as a constitutional-law scholar who is fluent in Arabic and specializes in issues of church and state, he could become the public intellectual of our time."

But Feldman said that he never originally saw any real-world applications for his course of study and that his interests stemmed from two courses he took in which he noticed the overlapping material.

"When I was an undergraduate Near Eastern Studies was a wonderful concentration [and] I also took a constitutional law class which was one of my most exciting classes," Feldman said. "Since there were overlapping ideas I thought it was interesting to pursue in tandem. I was studying it because I loved it, I had no idea it would work in real world."

This is not Feldman's first high-profile appearance in magazine rankings—New York Magazine once named him the "Most Beautiful Brainiac."

According to Mccammon, Feldman and Power were chosen for the diversity of their skill sets, and because "both of them are young and ambitious and clearly brilliant."

Power said that while she takes the ranking in stride, she doesn't yet feel that she has had an impact on foreign policy.

"I don't think the state of our foreign policy indicates much influence at present," Power said. "I don't measure influence by power or recognition—I measure influence by the small differences we make in the lives of others."

"Where I aspire to make a difference is to inject a concern for human consequences into American foreign policy," she said.

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